

Message Text

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY BUCHAREST PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 070841

FOR DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY ARMITAGE

FOLLOWING REPEAT BELGRADE 1622 SENT ACTION SECSTATE INFO ROME
TRIESTE ZAGREB BY POUCH DATED APRIL 6.

QUOTE

C O N F I D E N T I A L BELGRADE 1622

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR IT YO

SUBJ: ITALY-YUGOSLAV FLAREUP OVER ZONE B

REF : STATE 65712; 68206

1. ONE OF THE MURKIER ASPECTS OF ITALO-YUGOSLAV ZONE B
CONTROVERSY APPEARS TO BE WHEN AND HOW IT STARTED, AS STATE 68206
INDICATES.

2. ITALIAN EMBASSY HERE SAAS IT WAS SPARKED BY ERECTION OF NEW
SIGNS WHICH CAME TO ATTENTION OF ITALIAN AUTHORITIES IN FIRST
HALF OF FEBRUARY. SIGNS IN QUESTION ARE THOSE SAYING BOTH "SFR
YUGOSLAIVA" AND "SR SLOVENIA". RELIABLE JOURNALIST WITH
PRINCIPAL SLOVENIAN ORGAN DELO SAID SIGNS WENT UP IN LATE
JANUARY. AMCONSUL ZAGREB WAS TOLD SIGNS WERE FIRST
NOTED BY ITALIANS IN LATE JANUARY AND REPORTED TO ITALIAN
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AUTHORITIES AT THAT TIME.

3. WE ARE NOT CLEAR ON WHAT SIGNS WERE THERE BEFORE, IF ANY (PERHAPS AMCONSUL TRIESTE CAN THROW SOME LIGHT ON THIS). WE HAVE FOUND YUGOSLAV HERE VERY IMPRECISE WHEN QUESTIONED ABOUT SIGNS. INTERESTING EXAMPLE OF THIS WAS RESPONSE OF STOJILKOVIC, CONSELOR IN THE FOREIGN SECRETARIAT (FORMER ECONOMIC MINISTER- CONSELOR IN WASHINGTON). WHILE BEING VERY PRECISE AND AGGRESIVE ON OTHER ASPECTS OF SITUATION, HE SKIRTED SIGN ISSUE BY ASKING WHETHER WE KNEW WHAT THE MINIC-MEDICI CONVERSTAIONS HAD TO SAY ABOUTSIGNS, AND THEN OBSERVING THAT WITHOUT KNOWING THAT WE SHOULD BE CAREFUL IN COMMENTING ON THE SIGNS ISSUE.

4. IN ANY CASE, IT SEEMS YUGOSLAVS PROVIDED IMMEDIATE PRETEXT FOR PRESENT DISPUTE BY POSTING SIGNS AT SOME TIME LAST WINTER. SEEMS PLAUSIBLE THAT THEY MUST HAVE KNOWN THAT APPARENTLY SIGNIFICANT CHANGES IN IDENTIFICATION OF THE ZONE B SIDE OF THE DEMARKATION LINE WOULD REQUIRE AN ITALIAN RESPONSE. HOWEVER, THIS IS APPARENTLY NOT THE FIRST TIME SUCH SIGNS HAVE GONE UP, AND IT SEEMS THAT ITALIAN RESPONSE THIS TIME MAY HAVE BEEN SHARPER THAN IN PREVIOUS SIMILAR INSTANCES.

5. QUESTION REMAINS FOR US WHY YUGOSLAVS POSTED SIGNS WHEN THEY DID, AND WHY THEY REACTED SO MASSIVELY TO ITALIAN NOTES. YUGOSLAV FOREIGN POLICY MOVES CAN OF COURSE NEVER BE COMPLETELY DIVORCED FOR INTERNAL POLITICS. WE DO NOT HOWEVER SEE THIS AS A TIME WHEN THEY HAD PARTICULAR NEED TO EVOKE EXTERNAL THREAT. NOR IS ITALY ESPECIALLY ALARMING POTENTIAL AGRESSOR. FACT IS THAT CONSIDERABLE CAMPAIGN INVOLVING PUBLIC AT LARGE IN POLITICAL ACTION ALREADY WAS UNDERWAY IN CONNECTION WITH ELECTIONS AND REPUBLICAN/ PROVINCIAL PARTY CONGRESSES, AND CONTROVERSY WITH ITALY HAS DISTRACTED ATTENTION FROM THESE EVENTS.

6. MORE LIKELY MOTIVE LIES IN FRAMEWORK OF YUGOSLAV IMPATIENCE OVER NOT BEING ABLE TO OBTAIN A DEFINITIVE LEGAL SETTLEMENT OF ZONE B QUESTIONS. YUGOSLAVS CONTINUE TO FEEL THAT ANY REAL OR IMAGINED THREAT TO THEIR TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY MUST BE MET WITH FIRM, HIGHLY VOCAL AND EMOTIONAL REACTION WHICH AT TIMES LOOKS LIKE OVERKILL TO OUTSIDERS. THIS IMPERATIVE WAS MADE CLEAR WHEN ASST FOR SEC DIZDAREVIC TOLD CONFIDENTIAL

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AMBASSADOR APRIL 1 THAT YUGOSLAVS HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO REACT STRONGLY TO ANY SUCH CHALLENGE, INFERRING THAT TO CONDONE ONE INVITES ANOTHER (BELGRADE 1495). INFORMATION SECRETARY BUDIMOVSKI ILLUSTRATED THIS GENERAL SENSITIVITY ALL ALONG YUGOSLAV BORDERS IN CONVERSTAION APRIL 5 WITH PAO WHEN IN CONTEXT OF ZONE B DISPUTE, HE RAISED WHAT YUGOSLAVS VIEW AS SOVIET SUPPORT FOR CONTINUING BULGARIAN ASPIRATIONS TO MACEDONIA (BELGRADE 1611). WE NOTED

YUGOSLAV DIPLOMAT IN SOFIA ECHOED THIS "TWO FLANKS" THEME (SOFIA 0489).

7. AS FOR TIMING, WE AGREE WITH INR THAT TITO'S AGE IS UNDOUBTEDLY FACTOR. AS TIME APPROACHES WHEN TITO WILL LEAVE SCENE, GOY APPREHENSION OVER LINGERING AND POTENTIAL THREATS TO COUNTRY'S TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY MOUNTS. ANOTHER ELEMENT LIKELY WAS THE DECEMBER BREAKOFF OF THE SECRET ITALIAN-YUGOSLAV TALKS. ADDITIONALLY, WE BELIEVE WHOLE CONTEXT OF EUROPEAN EVENTS AT THIS TIME HAS BEARING. WITH SETTLEMENT OF OTHER LONG-STANDING TERRITORIAL DISPUTES IN EUROPE, CONFERENCE ON EUROPEAN SECURITY AND COOPERATION IS MOVING FORWARD WITH TRIESTE STILL UNSETTLED. YUGOSLAVS MAY WELL FEEL NOW IS TIME TO STRIKE HARD AS THEY SEE FRAMEWORK FOR FUTURE FALLING INTO PLACE WITH THEIR PROBLEM NOT GETTING SOLVED.

8. CONCIDENCE OF JOINT AMPHIBIOUS EXERCISES HAS HAD ONE BONUES FROM YUGOSLAV POINT OF VIEW: THEY HELPED GOY PORTRAY ITALIAN MOVES AS PART OF SINISTER ANTI-NONALIGNED CAMPAIGN AND WILL BE USEFUL IN GENERATING NONALIGNED SENTIMENT FOR YUGOSLAV POSITION AND AGAINST ITALIAN. THERE SEEMS GOOD POSSIBLILITY, HOWEVER THAT YUGOSLAVS AT THIS POINT HAVE MORE THAN THEY BARGAINED WHEN THEY POSTED SIGNS LAST WINTER. THEY MAY NOW HAVE IMAGINED THAT ITALIANS WOULD GO SO FAR AS TO INSIST THAT ZONE B REMAINS ITALIAN TERRITORY AT THIS LATE DATE, BUT ONCE IT HAPPENED DISPUTE TOOK ON DYNAMICS OF ITS OWN, PARTLY AS RESULT CONSCIOUS YUGOSLAV POLICY, WHICH HAS CARRIED IT ALONG TO PRESENT STAGE. TOON UNQUOTE RUSH

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